The War They Could Not Win

How the Enemies of Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia Fought With Words When Their Swords Failed.

A Multi-Front Examination of British Colonial, Afghan, and Maulvi Strategies to Decimate an Unconquerable Leader

An Integrated Historical Analysis of Military Defeat, Psychological Warfare, Coin Forgery, Linguistic Distortion, Colonial Caste-Classification, and the Deliberate Dismantling of a Sikh Sovereign's Legacy

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION — THE MAN THEY COULD NOT DEFEAT

When an enemy cannot defeat a leader on the battlefield, they attack his reputation, his identity, his lineage. This is the oldest strategy of warfare — older than empires, older than written history itself. The general who cannot be slain must be slandered. The sovereign who cannot be conquered must be classified. The warrior who will not fall must be diminished by other means — through words, through labels, through the slow and patient corruption of the historical record. This is not a theory. This is a documented pattern that recurs across civilizations, across centuries, across every continent where an unconquerable leader has stood against overwhelming force and refused to be destroyed.

And it is precisely what happened to Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia (1718– 1783) — the supreme commander of the Dal Khalsa, the liberator of Lahore, the founder of Kapurthala State, the survivor of the Wadda Ghallughara, the rebuilder of Harmandir Sahib, and perhaps the single most consequential Sikh military and political leader of the eighteenth century.

Let us state plainly who this man was, so that the magnitude of what his enemies attempted — and the depth of their failure — can be fully understood.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was born on 3 May 1718 in the village of Ahlu, near Lahore, in the heart of the Punjab. His father, Sardar Badar Singh, passed away when Jassa Singh was only four years old. His mother, Mata Jeevan Kaur — an accomplished raag-based kirtaniya of extraordinary spiritual depth — took the young child to Delhi, where they came under the personal care and protection of Mata Sundri Ji, the revered wife of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. For seven formative years, young Jassa Singh received an education of remarkable breadth: Gurbani, kirtan, Rabab mastery, languages, administration, diplomacy, martial arts. Mata Sundri Ji is said to have prophesied that the boy would one day become a ruler of men.

That prophecy was fulfilled beyond any measure that could have been imagined. Consider the record:

Year	Achievement
1748	Democratically elected Supreme Commander (Jathedar) of the Dal Khalsa at the Sarbat Khalsa on Baisakhi — the highest military honour bestowed upon any Sikh in the eighteenth century
1753	Succeeded Nawab Kapur Singh as Jathedar of Akal Takht and fourth Jathedar of Buddha Dal — the supreme leadership of the Nihang warrior order
1757–1759	Led sustained resistance against Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions; systematically harassed Afghan supply lines using devastating guerrilla tactics
1761	Captured Lahore and struck coins in the name of the Khalsa — the supreme act of sovereignty, declaring Sikh dominion over the capital of Punjab
Year	**Achievement**
1762	Survived the Wadda Ghallughara (the Great Holocaust) with twenty two wounds on his body — when an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 Sikhs were massacred by Abdali's forces
1762	Within months of the Ghallughara, led the Sikhs back to reclaim and rebuild the Harmandir Sahib, which Abdali had desecrated and destroyed
1764	Captured Sirhind, the seat of Afghan-Mughal power in eastern Punjab; killed the Afghan governor Zain Khan Sirhindi

1764	Led Sikh forces to the gates of Delhi itself — a feat that sent shockwaves through the collapsing Mughal Empire
1772	Founded Kapurthala State, establishing a sovereign Sikh domain that would endure for nearly two centuries
Year	**Achievement**
1783	Died at Bandala near Amritsar on 23 October, aged 65; cremated at Dera Baba Attal in Amritsar with the honour befitting the greatest Sikh leader of his age

This is not the record of an ordinary man. This is the record of a leader who fought in over thirty major battles across four decades, who was democratically elected by his peers to supreme command, who captured the capital of Punjab, who survived a genocide that killed tens of thousands, who bore twenty-two wounds on his body and refused to fall, who rebuilt the holiest shrine of his faith after it was desecrated, who struck coins declaring sovereignty, and who founded a state. He was Chief of the Nihang order — the Buddha Dal — the most feared warrior class in the history of Punjab. His contemporaries honoured him with the title Sultan-ulQaum — "King of the Nation" — and with the rank of Nawab, the supreme political title of the age.

This is the man whom his enemies attempted to diminish. And the central thesis of this article is as follows:

> **Central Thesis:**
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> Three separate but interconnected forces — (1) Ahmad Shah Abdali's Afghan empire and its Maulvi allies in Lahore, (2) the British colonial administration and its apparatus of caste-classification, and (3) later uncritical historians trapped by the echo chamber of enemy propaganda — each had independent strategic reasons to diminish Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. When military force failed to destroy him on the battlefield, they turned to psychological warfare, coin forgery, linguistic distortion, and caste-labeling. This article examines each strategy from every angle — military, political, linguistic, numismatic, sociological,

> and historiographical — to settle this matter permanently, comprehensively, and from every conceivable direction.

What follows is the integrated evidence — assembled across multiple disciplines, tested against multiple sources, and presented with the rigour that this subject demands and has too long been denied.

SECTION II: THE MILITARY RECORD — WHY ENEMIES NEEDED AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

Before we examine the weapons of words, coins, and classifications, we must first understand why these weapons were deployed. The answer lies in the military record — a record so extraordinary, so relentless, so marked by resilience in the face of annihilation, that it left every adversary of the Khalsa with a single inescapable conclusion: this man cannot be defeated on the battlefield.

The Four Decades of War

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's military career spans the entirety of the most violent period in Sikh history — from the aftermath of Banda Singh Bahadur's martyrdom in 1716 to the consolidation of Sikh sovereignty in the 1780s. He was not a commander who fought a single decisive battle and retired to his estates. He fought continuously, across four decades, against the most powerful military forces in the region: the dying Mughal Empire, the Afghan Durrani Empire at the height of its power, and the allied Muslim governors and chieftains of northern India.

The young Jassa Singh survived the Chhota Ghallughara of 1746 — the "Lesser Holocaust" — in which approximately 15,000 Sikhs were killed in the Kahnuwan area of Gurdaspur by Mughal forces. He emerged from that catastrophe not broken but hardened, and was elected Supreme Commander of the entire Dal Khalsa just two years later, in 1748, at the Sarbat Khalsa gathering on Baisakhi. He was thirty years old.

From that moment forward, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia led the Sikh Confederacy through an unbroken series of engagements. The scale and frequency of these battles are almost without

parallel in military history. Consider: between 1748 and 1767 alone — a span of just nineteen years — the Dal Khalsa under his overall leadership fought in campaigns at

Manupur, Khanpur, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar, Ram Rauni, Multan, Nadaun, Anandpur,

Mahilpur, Jalandhar, Sirhind, Lahore (multiple times), Sialkot, Gujranwala, Kup, Harnaulgarh, Pipli Sahib, Urmar Tanda, Chamkaur, Sirhind again, Delhi, Kasur, Malerkotla, and numerous smaller engagements.

This was not a conventional army fighting set-piece battles. The Sikhs under Jassa Singh perfected a form of guerrilla warfare — dhai phatt, the strategy of striking and withdrawing, of harassing supply lines, of appearing where the enemy least expected them and vanishing before he could respond — that rendered the conventional armies of the Mughal and Afghan empires almost completely ineffective. The Sikh cavalry could cover vast distances at extraordinary speed, attack with devastating force, and melt into the forests and marshlands of the Punjab before the enemy could organize a response.

The Capture of Lahore — 1761

The capture of Lahore in October-November 1761 was the single most symbolically powerful act of Sikh sovereignty in the eighteenth century. Lahore was the capital of the Punjab — the seat of Mughal and then Afghan power in the region. When the Sikhs under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia besieged and captured the city, they did not merely win a battle. They declared, in the most unambiguous terms possible, that the Punjab now belonged to the Khalsa.

The act that sealed this declaration was the striking of coins in the name of Guru Gobind Singh— the supreme symbol of sovereignty in the political culture of the subcontinent. To strike a coin was to declare oneself the ruler. And Jassa Singh, as supreme commander, presided over this act. The significance of this moment cannot be overstated: a community that had been outlawed, hunted, massacred, and driven into the jungles and swamps of the Punjab had risen to capture the capital and mint its own currency. It was the triumph of an idea — the idea of the Khalsa — over the most powerful military forces in the region.

The Wadda Ghallughara — February 1762

Just months after the capture of Lahore, Ahmad Shah Abdali returned to Punjab with a massive army, determined to crush the Sikhs once and for all. What followed, on 5–6 February 1762, was

the Wadda Ghallughara — the "Great Holocaust" — one of the most devastating massacres in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

The Sikh column, which included women, children, and elderly noncombatants, was moving through the area between Kup-Rahira and Barnala in what is now Ludhiana district. Abdali's forces, combined with troops from Malerkotla and other allied states, attacked with overwhelming numerical superiority. The fighting was savage. Estimates of the Sikh dead range from 10,000 to as many as 50,000, with the most commonly cited figure being 25,000 to 30,000 — up to one-third or even one-half of the entire Sikh population at the time.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia fought in the midst of the Ghallughara. He did not flee. He did not retreat to safety. He stood and fought — and he sustained twenty two wounds on his body. Twenty-two wounds. And he did not fall. He survived. This single fact — that the supreme commander of the Sikhs absorbed twenty-two wounds in the worst massacre in Sikh history and refused to die — tells us everything we need to know about why his enemies eventually turned to other weapons.

And here is what makes the Wadda Ghallughara the ultimate proof of Abdali's failure: within months of the massacre, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia led the Sikhs back to Amritsar. He presided over the reclamation and rebuilding of the Harmandir Sahib — the Golden Temple — which Abdali had desecrated, filled with refuse, and destroyed. The Sikhs rebuilt it. They came back. After every massacre, after every invasion, after every attempt at extermination — they came back. Stronger. More determined. More unified.

The Fall of Sirhind and the March on Delhi — 1764

Two years after the Ghallughara, Jassa Singh led the Dal Khalsa to the capture of Sirhind — the administrative seat of Afghan-Mughal power in eastern Punjab. The Afghan governor, Zain Khan Sirhindi, was killed. Sirhind — the city that had witnessed the martyrdom of the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji — was now in Sikh hands.

In 1764, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia led Sikh forces to the very gates of Delhi, marking the first major Sikh military projection toward the Mughal capital. This was not yet a full capture of the city, but

it shattered the psychological barrier that had protected Delhi for centuries. The Mughal court, already weakened by internal collapse, now faced a rising Sikh power that could strike the imperial capital at will.

Nearly two decades later, in March 1783, the Sikhs returned — this time not merely to threaten Delhi, but to take it. Under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the Khalsa forces entered the Red Fort, defeated Prince Mirza Shikoh, and raised the Nishan Sahib over the seat of Mughal power. Contemporary accounts record that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was briefly seated on the throne of Delhi as **Badshah Singh.**

The Sikhs secured construction rights for Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, and Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib — permanent markers of Sikh sovereignty in the heart of the Mughal capital.

The Unconquerable Commander

Let us now draw the strategic conclusion that Jassa Singh's enemies themselves were forced to draw.

Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded Punjab nine times between 1748 and 1767. He commanded one of the most powerful military forces in the world — a massive Afghan army that had defeated the Marathas at the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 and had crushed every other force in northern India. And yet he could not permanently subdue the Sikhs. Every time he withdrew from Punjab, the Sikhs recaptured territory. Every time he massacred them, they rebuilt. Every time he destroyed their sacred sites, they reconstructed them. Even the Wadda Ghallughara — his most devastating blow — failed to break Sikh resistance.

After nine invasions, after the Great Holocaust, after the desecration of the Harmandir Sahib, after deploying every weapon in the arsenal of conventional military power — Abdali could not destroy the Sikhs. And the reason he could not destroy them had a name: Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

> " When swords fail, enemies turn to words. When armies cannot conquer a leader, they attempt to conquer his reputation. This is the oldest strategy of

> warfare — and it is precisely what was deployed against Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Not because the strategy was honorable, but because there was no other option left. Every sword had been tried. Every army had been sent. Every massacre had been committed. And still, he stood."

It is this military context — this record of absolute unconquerability — that explains everything that follows in this article. The coin forgery, the linguistic distortion, the colonial classification, the echo chamber of historians — none of these would have been necessary if Jassa Singh Ahluwalia could have been defeated on the battlefield. They were deployed precisely because he could not be defeated on the battlefield. The weapons of words were the weapons of last resort — the weapons of enemies who had exhausted every other option.

SECTION III: THE FIRST FRONT — ABDALI'S FORCES AND THE MAULVI STRATEGY

A. Ahmad Shah Abdali's Repeated Failures Against the Sikhs

Ahmad Shah Abdali — also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani — was the founder of the Durrani Empire and one of the most formidable military commanders of the eighteenth century. His invasion record in Punjab is staggering in its scale: nine major invasions between 1748 and 1767, each backed by a massive Afghan army, each intended to establish permanent Afghan sovereignty over the Punjab. His victory at the Third Battle of Panipat in January 1761 — in which the Maratha Confederacy was decisively defeated — appeared to make him the supreme power in the Indian subcontinent.

And yet the Sikhs defeated his strategic objectives at every turn.

The pattern was always the same. Abdali would invade with overwhelming force. He would devastate the countryside. He would attack Sikh positions, destroy their forts, desecrate their shrines. And then he would withdraw — because his lines of supply and communication stretched back over the Khyber Pass to Kabul, and he could not maintain a permanent occupation force in Punjab. The moment he withdrew, the Sikhs returned. They recaptured territory. They rebuilt their forts. They reconstructed their shrines. They struck coins. They

administered the land. And they waited for the next invasion — which they would resist with the same ferocity, the same guerrilla tactics, and the same refusal to be permanently conquered.

This cycle — invasion, devastation, withdrawal, Sikh resurgence — repeated itself nine times over two decades. It was a military stalemate that Abdali could not break. The conventional military doctrine of the age — conquer the capital, destroy the army, occupy the territory — could not work against the Sikhs, because the Sikhs did not operate according to conventional military doctrine. They had no single capital that could be captured and held. They had no single army that could be destroyed in a decisive battle. Their leadership was democratically constituted and could be replaced. Their territorial base was dispersed across the Punjab. And their motivation — rooted in the deepest convictions of faith, community, and sovereign dignity — could not be broken by any force of arms.

Abdali realised, eventually, that military force alone could not destroy the Sikhs. He needed allies within Punjab's civilian population — particularly the religious leaders of Lahore — to wage a different kind of war.

B. The Maulvi Strategy — Psychological Warfare from Within

The Maulvis and Muslim religious leaders of Lahore occupied a position of considerable influence in eighteenth-century Punjab. They were the custodians of religious authority, the interpreters of Islamic law, the educators of the Muslim elite, and — critically — the correspondents and advisors who maintained communication with the Afghan court in Kabul. They served as the conduit between the local administration and the distant sovereign.

The rising power of the Sikh Confederacy represented an existential threat to this establishment. As the Sikhs captured territory, levied revenues, and established their own administrative structures, the political and economic position of the Muslim religious leadership was directly undermined. The Maulvis could not defeat the Sikhs militarily — they had no armies, no cavalry, no artillery. But they possessed two weapons that armies do not carry: the written word and the power to provoke. Their strategy was threefold, and it was deployed with the deliberation and precision of a military campaign:

1. **Provocation:** To provoke Abdali into returning to Punjab by enraging him against the Sikhs — by presenting the Sikh capture of Lahore as an intolerable affront to Afghan sovereignty and Islamic dignity.
2. **Delegitimization:** To undermine Sikh legitimacy by attacking the identity and reputation of their supreme leader — by reducing the Sultan-ul-Qaum to a caricature, a man of low birth unworthy of the sovereignty he had claimed.
3. **Social Warfare:** To use derogatory language and caste labels to diminish the stature of Jassa Singh in the eyes of both Muslim and Hindu society — to turn the social prejudices of the age into weapons against the Khalsa's leadership.

This was not spontaneous hatred. This was a calculated strategy of psychological warfare, designed to accomplish what nine Afghan invasions had failed to achieve.

C. THE FORGED COIN — The Smoking Gun of Maulvi Propaganda

We come now to what may be the single most critical piece of evidence in this entire examination — the coin that appeared after the Sikh capture of Lahore in 1761.

After the Sikhs under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia captured Lahore and seized the royal mint, a coin was circulated bearing the following Persian inscription:

“Sikka zad dar jahan bafazal-i-Akal, mulk-i-Ahmad garift Jassa Kalal.”

“The coin struck in the world by the Grace of the Immortal; the
country of Ahmad captured by Jassa Kalal.”

This coin has been cited by generations of historians as documentary proof that Jassa Singh either identified himself — or was identified by his contemporaries — as “Kalal.” It has become one of the principal foundations for the caste-based narrative attached to his name.

Yet before any external comparison, numismatic tradition, or scholarly verdict is consulted, the inscription itself fails a far more fundamental test.

The problem is not merely what the inscription says — it is what it omits. The coin reads “Jassa,” not **Jassa Singh**. From 1699 onward, “Singh” was not optional; it was the non-negotiable identity of the Khalsa. No Khalsa leader — and certainly not the democratically elected Supreme Commander of the Dal Khalsa — would strike a sovereign coin omitting “Singh” from his own name.

This single omission is fatal to the coin’s authenticity. No Sikh-issued coin would:

- Identify an individual instead of the Guru
- Omit the Khalsa designation “Singh”
- Use a caste-coded slur
- Violate Sikh numismatic tradition

All four violations converge on this object. The inscription is not Sikh sovereignty speaking in its own voice — it is enemy propaganda crafted for Afghan and Mughal consumption.

The Sikh Encyclopedia confirms this directly:

“This coin was soon withdrawn because it bore the name not of the Guru but of a Sikh and that too in a truncated form. It is also considered that this coin was not issued by the Sikhs but was arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore for dispatching it to Ahmad Shah Durrani with the intention of rousing his ire.”

This is the smoking gun: a forged coin designed to provoke Abdali into genocide and to stain Jassa Singh’s name with a caste label he never used.

First: The Sikh Coin Tradition. Every authentic Sikh coin in the historical record was dedicated to the Gurus — not to individual leaders. This was not an incidental convention; it was a fundamental principle of Sikh sovereignty. The very first Sikh coin, issued by Banda Singh Bahadur after the conquest of Sirhind in 1710, bore the inscription: "Victory is of

Gobind Singh, the king of kings, by the grace of the True Master." No Sikh leader — not Banda Singh, not Nawab Kapur Singh, not any Misaldar — ever placed his personal name on a coin. To do so would have violated the foundational principle that Sikh sovereignty was collective, vested in the Khalsa and the Guru, not in any individual. The "Jassa Kalal" coin violates this principle. It is an anomaly in the numismatic record — and anomalies demand explanation.

Second: The "Kalal" Label. No Sikh leader would place a derogatory caste label on an official coin of sovereignty. A coin is a declaration to the world — it is the most public, most permanent, most authoritative statement a sovereign can make. If Jassa Singh himself had ordered this coin, why would he use a term that his family never used for themselves? His family identified as Ahluwalia — "of Ahluwal" — a geographic identity derived from their ancestral village of Ahlu. The presence of the word "Kalal" on the coin is not merely inconsistent with the family's selfidentification — it is strategically damaging to the very sovereignty the coin purports to declare.
No competent sovereign stamps himself with a slur on his own currency.

Third: The Sikh Encyclopedia's Verdict. The authoritative Sikh Encyclopedia — the most comprehensive reference work on Sikh history and tradition — addresses this coin directly.
Its verdict is unambiguous:

"This coin was soon withdrawn because it bore the name not of the Guru but of a Sikh and that too in a truncated form. It is also considered that this coin was not issued by the Sikhs but was arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore for dispatching it to Ahmad Shah Durrani with the intention of rousing his ire and early suppression of the Sikhs."

— The Sikh Encyclopedia, entry on "Sikh Coins or Numismatics" This passage is worth reading again, slowly. The authoritative Sikh reference work states that the coin was "arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore" — that is, by the Maulvis — "for despatching it to Ahmad Shah Durrani with the intention of rousing his ire." The coin was not an act of Sikh sovereignty. It was an act of enemy provocation.

Fourth: The Strategic Purpose. The coin served two purposes simultaneously, and this dual function reveals its true origin:

It was created to be sent to Abdali — to enrage him, to goad him into returning to Punjab with his army, to provoke another devastating invasion. The inscription was deliberately crafted to maximize insult: here is a "Kalal" — a man of the lowest occupation — who has captured the country of the great Ahmad Shah. The provocation was calculated to exploit Abdali's pride and his sense of sovereign dignity.

It simultaneously attached a derogatory caste label to Jassa Singh's name, creating a "documentary record" — a physical, permanent artifact — that later historians would encounter and uncritically cite as evidence of his "caste identity." The Maulvis of Lahore were not merely provoking a military response; they were planting a historical land mine that would detonate across centuries.

Fifth: The Replacement Coin. The authentic Sikh coin struck after the conquest of Sirhind in 1764 — the "Gobind Shahi Sikka" (coin of Guru Gobind Singh) — bore no individual's name. It was dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in accordance with the established Sikh tradition of collective sovereignty. This was a silver coin that continued to be issued from the Lahore mint up to 1777. This was the genuine Sikh coin tradition. The "Jassa Kalal" coin was an anomaly — because it was not a Sikh coin at all.

> " The forged coin bearing 'Jassa Kalal' was not an act of Sikh sovereignty — it was an act of enemy propaganda. The Maulvis of Lahore created a weapon disguised as a coin: one that would simultaneously provoke Abdali into genocide and permanently stain the name of the unconquerable Sikh commander. It is the smoking gun of psychological warfare — a single object

> that served two strategic purposes with devastating efficiency. And it has been cited, uncritically, by generations of historians who mistook enemy propaganda for documentary evidence."

D. The Kalial-to-Kalal Linguistic Distortion

Beyond the coin, there is a second, equally deliberate act of linguistic manipulation that must be exposed.

Historical records indicate that one of Jassa Singh's ancestors married into a Kalial family. The Kalials were a Jat farming community in Punjab — respectable, landowning, agriculturalist people. The word "Kalial" carries no occupational stigma. It is a community identity associated with the land — with farming, with settled agricultural life.

The word "Kalal," however, is an entirely different matter. "Kalal" refers specifically to the occupation of liquor distillation — a trade that carried significant social stigma in the casteconscious society of eighteenth-century Punjab. In the hierarchical social system of the time, liquor distillation was regarded as a degraded occupation. To be labelled "Kalal" was to be assigned to one of the lowest rungs of the social ladder.

The shift from "Kalial" to "Kalal" was not accidental. A single syllable — the transposition of a vowel, the substitution of one word for another — transformed a respectable farming community into a stigmatized occupation. This was a deliberate linguistic distortion, a calculated act of social warfare designed to achieve maximum damage with minimum effort. It was designed to:

6. Associate Jassa Singh with a stigmatized occupation, thereby diminishing his social standing in the eyes of both Hindu caste conscious society and Muslim society.
7. Undermine the legitimacy of his leadership — because in the social logic of the age, a man of "low" occupation was not worthy of sovereignty.

8. Create internal divisions within the Sikh community itself; by importing the poison of caste hierarchy into a community whose founding principles explicitly rejected it.

But there is a further, crucial point that destroys this entire construction. Even the marriage connection to the Kalial family was maternal — one ancestor married into a Kalial family. In no known system of Indian genealogy does marriage into a family change one's own surname, lineage, or identity — especially not across multiple generations. The family's own identity was and remained Ahluwalia, derived from their village Ahlu. The maternal connection to the Kalial family — a connection that has been distorted into "Kalal" — was precisely that: a maternal connection, not a patrilineal identity.

And here is the evidence that seals this argument: Jassa Singh's maternal uncle (mamma) was known as **Bagh Singh Hallowalia** — not "Bagh Singh Kalal." If the maternal family identified as "Kalal," why would the maternal uncle carry the name Hallowalia? The uncle's own name proves that the maternal family did not identify by the occupation-based label. The "Kalal" designation was imposed from outside — by adversaries, not by the family itself.

“Thus, before the British ever arrived, the first and most aggressive campaign to diminish Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was already underway — forged in the courts of Lahore, sharpened by the Maulvis, and deployed as psychological warfare when military force had failed.”

“This completed the first front of the war against Jassa Singh’s identity — a war fought not with swords, but with words.”

SECTION IV: THE SECOND FRONT — BRITISH COLONIAL WARFARE AGAINST SIKH IDENTITY

A. The British Assessment of the Sikh Threat

The British East India Company — and later the British Crown — arrived in Punjab not as scholars or philanthropists but as conquerors. Their interest in the Sikhs was not academic; it was strategic. And from the earliest period of British engagement with Sikh polity, they

identified one institution above all others as the greatest obstacle to their conquest: the Akali Nihang order.

The Nihangs — the "Crocodiles of the Faith," the warrior-ascetics of the Khalsa — were the shock troops, the vanguard, the unbreakable core of Sikh military power. They answered to no temporal authority except the Akal Takht. They were trained from childhood in the arts of war. They fought with a ferocity that astonished and terrified European observers. And their institutional structure — the Buddha Dal and the Taruna Dal — provided the organizational framework for the entire Sikh military confederacy.

Sir John Malcolm, one of the most perceptive early British observers of the Sikhs, wrote in 1812 a passage that reveals the depth of British understanding — and British concern:

"The Acalis have a great interest in maintaining both the religion and government of the Sikhs, as established by Guru Govind; as, on its continuance in that shape, their religious and political influence must depend."

— Sir John Malcolm,
Sketch of the Sikhs (1812)

Malcolm understood — with the clarity of a strategic analyst — that the Akali Nihang order was the institutional backbone of Sikh sovereignty. If the Nihangs could be neutralized, Sikh power would collapse. The religion, the governance structure, the military capacity — all of it depended on the Nihang order's continued vitality.

And so the British set about destroying them.

After the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845–46 and 1848–49), the British specifically targeted the Akali Nihangs for elimination. The campaign was methodical and brutal:

- Nihang warriors were slaughtered at Lahore.
- They were attacked at Amritsar.
- The British attacked the Akal Takht itself — the supreme seat of Sikh temporal authority.
- Surviving Nihangs were driven into the jungles of central India.

- "Shoot-on-sight" orders were issued against Nihang warriors.
- Nihang leaders were murdered through collaborators and agents.

This was not peacekeeping. This was the systematic destruction of the single institution that the British had identified as the greatest threat to colonial rule in Punjab.

B. The Colonial Caste-Classification Machine

The physical destruction of the Nihang order was accompanied by a second, more insidious campaign: the systematic project of caste-classification that would reshape Indian society — and Indian self-understanding — for generations.

The British began decennial census operations in India from 1871 onward. The census required every person to identify with a specific caste — a process that had profound and often devastating consequences. What had been fluid, locally defined, and context dependent identities were forced into rigid official categories. As modern scholarship has conclusively demonstrated, this process was "more telling of the administrative needs of the British than of the social reality for the people of British India." The census did not record Indian society as it was; it remade Indian society according to the requirements of colonial governance.

The apparatus of classification extended far beyond the census. Herbert Risley and the Ethnographic Survey of India created a vast system of racial and caste taxonomy, measuring skulls, recording occupational designations, and assigning every community in India to a specific rung on a hierarchical ladder. This was presented as science — as disinterested anthropological inquiry. It was, in reality, an instrument of imperial control.

In Punjab specifically, the colonial classification project took a particularly consequential form with the **Punjab Alienation of Land Act of 1901**. This law created an "agricultural tribe" category — and membership in this category was almost compulsory for anyone who wished to buy or sell agricultural land. Research has demonstrated that caste groups across Punjab actively manipulated their declared identity in response to this legislation, proving beyond any doubt that colonial categories were artificial constructs imposed for administrative purposes, not accurate records of historical social reality.

The strategic purposes of British caste-classification were multiple and interconnected:

Strategic Purpose	Method	Effect
Divide and Rule	Rigidify caste identities into fixed, mutually exclusive categories	Prevented inter-caste solidarity that could threaten colonial rule; turned communities against each other along caste lines
Diminish Warrior Classes	Assign "low" caste labels to fierce warrior communities	Psychologically undermined the martial identity, self-respect, and collective pride of communities that had most fiercely resisted British conquest
Historical Revision	Rewrite the histories of Indian leaders through the lens of caste classification	Diminished the legacy of the very warriors and sovereigns who had challenged imperial power, making their achievements appear anomalous rather than natural
Administrative Control	Create legible, manageable categories for taxation, recruitment, and land management	Made Indian society "readable" by foreign administrators who had no understanding of its actual social complexity

This was not scholarship. This was statecraft. And every classification, every label, every category in the British gazetteers and census records must be understood as what it was: an instrument of imperial governance, not a disinterested record of social reality.

C. Lepel Griffin — The Colonial Agent as "Historian"

No discussion of the colonial assault on Sikh identity is complete without an examination of Lepel Henry Griffin (1838–1908) — the British administrator whose work has been cited by generations of historians as though it were authoritative scholarship.

Griffin was not a historian. He was a colonial administrator — an agent of the British imperial state. He arrived in India in 1860, was posted to Lahore, and eventually became Chief Secretary of the Punjab. His career was spent in the service of empire, and his writings were produced in the service of imperial governance.

His 1865 work The Panjab Chiefs — later expanded and revised as Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab — is the source most frequently cited for the classification of the Ahluwalia family. In this work, Griffin dismissed the Bhatti Rajput origin tradition of the Ahluwalia family as "fictitious." He classified the family according to the occupational categories that served the administrative needs of the colonial state.

Let us be precise about what Griffin was and what he was not:

- He was **not** trained in Indian genealogy, in Persian manuscript analysis, in Punjabi oral tradition, or in Sikh history.
- He was **not** a disinterested scholar. He was an official of the colonial government, writing for the colonial government, to serve the purposes of the colonial government.
- He had **neither** the cultural understanding, the linguistic depth, nor the motivation to accurately trace Indian genealogies that had been maintained through oral traditions spanning centuries.
- His classifications were **administrative tools** for colonial governance — designed to make Punjabi society legible and manageable for foreign rulers.
- He dismissed the Bhatti Rajput genealogy of the Ahluwalia's **without providing any counter-evidence** — merely asserting it to be fictitious, as though the assertion of a colonial administrator constituted proof.

Yet later historians — including some Sikh historians — uncritically repeated Griffin's classifications as though they were established fact. The colonial administrator became the authority. The imperial classification became the historical record. And the damage — the slow, patient corruption of an identity that had been forged in battle and sustained through generations of sacrifice — was done.

> "The British did not come to Punjab to study history — they came to conquer it. Every classification, every label, every categorisation in their gazetteers and census records served one purpose: to make Indian society legible and manageable for foreign rule. To cite Lepel Griffin as an authority on Sikh

> genealogy is to mistake a colonial weapon for a scholarly instrument. Griffin did not discover the 'Kalal' identity of the Ahluwalia family — he imposed it, in the same way that the British imposed caste categories on every community in India, for the same strategic purposes, with the same disregard for historical truth."

D. The Nihang Connection — Why Jassa Singh's Legacy Was Specifically Targeted We must now draw the connection that ties the British campaign against the Nihang order to the British campaign against Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's legacy — because these were not separate campaigns. They were two faces of the same strategic coin.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was the fourth Jathedar of the Buddha Dal — the supreme leader of the Nihang order. He held this position from 1753 until his death in 1783. The Buddha Dal was not merely a military unit; it was the institutional embodiment of Sikh sovereignty, the guardian of the Akal Takht, the keeper of the martial traditions of the Khalsa. To be its Jathedar was to occupy the highest position in the Sikh military hierarchy — higher than any Misaldar, higher than any territorial chief.

The British identified the Nihang order as the single greatest threat to colonial rule in Punjab. They set about its physical destruction with systematic efficiency. But physical destruction alone was insufficient — because the Nihang order derived its legitimacy from its history, from its traditions, from the memory of its great leaders. And the greatest of those leaders — the one whose memory most powerfully sustained the Nihang identity — was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

By diminishing the legacy of the Nihang order's greatest historical leader, the British struck at the very foundation of Nihang identity and legitimacy. If Jassa Singh — the Sultan-ulQaum himself — could be reduced to a "poor Kalal," then the entire Nihang tradition could be diminished. The warriors who traced their lineage and their institutional memory to Jassa Singh's leadership would find their heritage degraded, their pride undermined, their sense of historical destiny diminished.

This was not an accident. This was not a scholarly disagreement about genealogy. This was strategic psychological warfare against an enemy the British feared more than any other in Punjab — an enemy they had been forced to destroy by force of arms, and whose memory they now sought to destroy by force of classification.

SECTION V: THE THIRD FRONT — THE TRAP THAT CAUGHT HISTORIANS

A. The Echo Chamber Effect

We have now examined two fronts of the war against Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's legacy: the Maulvi propaganda campaign of the 1760s and the British colonial classification project of the nineteenth century. We must now examine the third front — the one that proved, in many ways, the most damaging of all: the trap that caught later historians.

This trap operates through a mechanism that students of propaganda will immediately recognise: the echo chamber effect. It works as follows:

The forged coin of 1761 created a physical artifact — a "documentary source" — bearing the label "Jassa Kalal." The Maulvi propaganda campaign disseminated this label through correspondence, through oral transmission, through the networks of religious authority that connected Lahore to the Afghan court. The British colonial census and gazetteers then picked up this label and fixed it in official records — giving it the imprimatur of state authority. And once the label appeared in British records, it acquired an aura of documentary reliability that it had never possessed when it was merely an enemy's slander.

Later historians — including some Sikh historians — encountered these sources and repeated them. Each repetition gave the false narrative more apparent authority. The more it was repeated, the more it appeared to be "established fact." A historian writing in 1900 could cite the British gazetteers. A historian writing in 1950 could cite the historian who had cited the gazetteers. A historian writing in 2000 could cite the historian who had cited the historian who had cited the gazetteers. With each layer of citation, the original source — the forged coin, the Maulvi propaganda, the colonial classification — receded further from view, while the "established fact" of the "Kalal" identity appeared more and more secure.

This is how propaganda becomes history: through uncritical repetition across generations. It is one of the most insidious mechanisms of historical distortion, because it does not require active malice from the later historians. It requires only a failure of source criticism — a failure to ask the most basic questions about where a piece of information originated and whose interests it served.

B. The Failure of Source Criticism

Historians who repeated the "Kalal" label failed to ask questions that any competent researcher would ask of any controversial historical claim. The failure is not one of intelligence; it is one of method. Let us state these questions plainly, and note the answers:

Question a Competent Historian Should Have Asked	Answer
Did Jassa Singh or his family ever use the label "Kalal" for themselves?	**No.** The family identified as Ahluwalia — "of Ahluwal" — derived from their ancestral village.
Question a Competent Historian Should Have Asked	**Answer**
Does the earliest Sikh biographical source — Jassa Singh Binod by Sri Ram Sukh Rao — use the label "Kalal"?	**No.** It identifies his lineage as Rajput Bhatti.
Question a Competent Historian Should Have Asked	**Answer**
Was the coin bearing "Jassa Kalal" authenticated as a Sikh-issued coin?	**No.** The Sikh Encyclopedia itself states it was likely "arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore."
Is the coin consistent with the established Sikh numismatic tradition?	**No.** All authentic Sikh coins were dedicated to the Gurus, not to individual leaders.
Did the maternal uncle use the label "Kalal"?	**No.** He was known as Bagh Singh Hallowalia.
Is the label "poor Kalal" consistent with the family's documented economic status?	**No.** The family owned four villages — Ahlo, Hallo, Toor, and Chak.
Does the word "Kalal" match the actual community name?	**No.** The ancestral connection was to the Kalial community — a Jat farming family — not "Kalal."

Who first used the label in historical documents, and what were their interests?	The earliest documented use appears in the forged coin — arranged by adversaries of the Sikhs.

Not a single one of these questions yields an answer that supports the "Kalal" identification. Every question, without exception, points in the same direction: the label was imposed by adversaries and repeated by historians who did not interrogate their sources. The failure of source criticism is complete and comprehensive.

C. The Convergence of Enemy Interests

There is one final structural argument that must be made — and it is perhaps the most powerful argument of all.

Consider the three forces that independently promoted the "Kalal" label:

- **The Maulvis of Lahore** wanted to provoke Abdali into returning to Punjab and to diminish Sikh legitimacy. They had every reason to create a derogatory label for the Sikh commander.
- **Ahmad Shah Abdali** wanted to destroy Sikh power in Punjab. He had every reason to demean the leader who had captured his provincial capital and struck coins declaring Sikh sovereignty over his territory.
- **The British colonial administration** wanted to conquer Punjab and neutralise Sikh resistance — specifically, the Nihang order of which Jassa Singh had been the supreme chief. They had every reason to diminish the legacy of the single most important Nihang leader in history.

Three enemies. Three independent strategic motivations. Three separate fronts of psychological warfare. And all three converged on the same weapon: a caste label designed to reduce a sovereign to a stereotype.

When three enemies — enemies who were themselves in conflict with each other, enemies who operated in different centuries and from different civilisational positions — independently arrive

at the same narrative about a historical figure, the honest historian must ask: whose interest does this narrative serve?

> The answer is clear. It serves the interest of every force that opposed Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab. And it serves no other interest. Not truth. Not history. Not scholarship. Only the strategic objectives of enemies who could not defeat Jassa Singh Ahluwalia on the battlefield and who therefore sought to defeat him in the historical record.
>
> "Three enemies — the Maulvis, Abdali, and the British — each with their own strategic reasons to diminish the unconquerable Sikh commander.

> Three separate fronts of psychological warfare, all converging on the same weapon: a caste label designed to reduce a sovereign to a stereotype. When three enemies agree on a narrative, the honest historian must ask: whose interest does this narrative serve? The answer reveals the truth that the narrative was designed to conceal."

SECTION VI: THE EVIDENCE THAT DESTROYS THE FALSE NARRATIVE

Let us now assemble the complete evidentiary case — integrating all the strands of analysis from the preceding sections — into a single, comprehensive, unanswerable catalogue of evidence that demolishes the false "Kalal" narrative. This evidence comes from multiple independent sources and multiple disciplines. Each piece alone raises serious doubt.

Taken together, they are conclusive.

Evidence 1: The Earliest Source

The earliest biographical work on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia is Jassa Singh Binod, written by Sri Ram Sukh Rao. This work identifies his lineage as Rajput Bhatti — the same Bhatti Rajput lineage that ruled Jaisalmer. According to this tradition, one of the Bhatti Rajputs, Rana Har Rai, left the throne of Jaisalmer rather than submit to the Mughal emperor's demands, and migrated to Punjab, where his descendants settled and eventually founded the village of Ahlu. There is no mention of "Kalal" in this earliest source. The label appears only in later sources — sources that can be traced, directly or indirectly, to the forged coin and to colonial classifications.

Evidence 2: The Landownership Argument

Jassa Singh's family owned four villages: **Ahlo, Hallo, Toor, and Chak.** This is an established, undisputed fact in the historical record. A family that owns four villages is a landowning family — a family of established position, of resources, of standing in the community. The characterisation of this family as "poor Kalal" — poor liquor distillers — is not merely false; it is historically, socially, and logically impossible. Families engaged in liquor distillation did not own four villages. Landowning families of four villages were not classified among the lowest occupational groups. The two descriptions are mutually exclusive, and the documented landownership is the one that is independently verified.

Evidence 3: The Maternal Uncle

Jassa Singh's maternal uncle was known as **Bagh Singh Hallowalia** — not "Bagh Singh Kalal." If the maternal family identified as "Kalal," the maternal uncle's designation would reflect that identity. It does not. The maternal uncle's name — Hallowalia — proves that the maternal family identified by a geographic designation (from the village of Hallo), not by an occupational caste label. The "Kalal" designation was not used by the family. It was imposed from outside.

Evidence 4: The Mother's Spiritual Eminence

Mata Jeevan Kaur was not an obscure woman from a marginal family. She was an accomplished raag-based kirtaniya — a musician of the highest order who had mastered the complex system of classical Indian music as applied to Sikh devotional practice. She trained young Jassa Singh in Asa Di Vaar at the age of four. After his father's passing, she took him to Delhi, where Mata

Sundri Ji — the revered wife of Guru Gobind Singh Ji — kept them in her personal care and household for seven years.

This speaks to a family of considerable standing. Mata Sundri Ji was the most revered woman in the Sikh community of the early eighteenth century. She did not take into her personal household families of no standing. The seven years of education that young Jassa Singh received — literacy, Gurbani, kirtan, Rabab mastery, languages, administration, diplomacy, martial arts — were the education of a future leader, provided to a child from a family of recognised merit and position.

Evidence 5: The Education Argument

Seven years of education under Mata Sundri Ji's personal household in Delhi represents an extraordinary investment in a child's future. The breadth of this education — spiritual, musical, martial, administrative, linguistic, and diplomatic — is the education of someone who was expected to lead. Only a family of established lineage, of recognised spiritual devotion, and of substantial social connections would have had the access, the resources, and the standing to place their child in the personal household of the most revered woman in the Sikh community for seven years. The "poor Kalal" narrative is completely incompatible with this documented history.

Evidence 6: The Coin Evidence

The Sikh Encyclopedia — the most authoritative reference work on Sikh history — states explicitly that the coin bearing "Jassa Kalal" was likely "arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore for despatching it to Ahmad Shah Durrani with the intention of rousing his ire and early suppression of the Sikhs." The coin was not a Sikh coin. It was an enemy weapon. Every historical argument that rests on this coin as evidence of Jassa Singh's "identity" rests on a foundation of enemy propaganda.

Evidence 7: The Self-Identification Test

Neither Jassa Singh, nor his ancestors, nor his descendants, nor his maternal uncle, nor any early Sikh source ever used the label "Kalal" for this family.

The family's self-identification was Ahluwalia — "of Ahluwal" — a geographic identity derived from their ancestral village. In any system of identity — legal, cultural, genealogical, or social — self-identification carries more weight than labels imposed by adversaries. The "Kalal" label fails the self-identification test completely.

Evidence 8: The Marriage Was Based on Gursikhi, Not Caste

Even the ancestral marriage connection to the Kalial family (note: Kalial, not Kalal) was contracted on the basis of Gursikhi — devotion to the Guru's path — not on the basis of caste or occupational identity. In the Sikh tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marriages were arranged between families on the basis of spiritual devotion, character, and service to the Panth. The marriage into a Kalial family was a recognition of that family's Gursikhi, not an adoption of an occupational identity. To reduce this spiritual bond to a caste classification is to fundamentally misunderstand the social world of early Sikh Punjab.

Furthermore, the question of whether the ancestral marriage was into the Kalial community or a community later mislabelled as “Kalal” remains a disputed historical point — but it is ultimately immaterial to the identity of the Ahluwalia family. Whether the connection was to the Kalial — a substantial Jat community with a significant presence across multiple regions of the Punjab and in nearly every province of present-day Pakistan, numbering in the tens of thousands — or to a family that later came to be called by the corrupted label “Kalal,” the nature of the marriage remains the same. It was contracted on the basis of the girl’s personal merits and the family’s standing as devoted Gursikhs — not on the basis of caste identity, which Sikh philosophy rejects as a criterion for human relationships. To reduce a marriage grounded in spiritual devotion and family merit to a caste classification is to impose a Hindu social framework upon a community that had explicitly and deliberately transcended it.

The evidence, taken as a whole, is not merely suggestive. It is conclusive. From every direction — numismatic, genealogical, linguistic, biographical, sociological, and historiographical — the "Kalal" narrative collapses. There is no early evidence for it. The physical artifact that appears to support it (the coin) has been identified as enemy propaganda by the most authoritative Sikh reference work. The family's documented landownership, maternal lineage, self-identification, spiritual standing, and educational history are all incompatible with it. And the forces that promoted it — the Maulvis, the Afghans, and the British — each had independent strategic reasons to fabricate it.

Evidence 9: The Ahluwalia Katra — Not "Kalal Katra"

One of the most powerful pieces of institutional evidence that demolishes the "Kalal" narrative is the Katra Ahluwalia in Amritsar — a planned and secured residential locality developed by Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia himself, circa 1760, in the immediate vicinity of Sri Harmandir Sahib. This was not a minor settlement. It was a strategically designed urban quarter, built under the direct patronage and authority of Jassa Singh, intended to house his community, his soldiers, and the families connected to the Ahluwalia misl.

The name is Katra Ahluwalia. Not Katra Kalal. Not Katra Kalial. It was called Ahluwalia then, and it is called Ahluwalia now — more than two and a half centuries later. The locality still stands to this day, and its name has never once been recorded as anything other than Ahluwalia in any historical map, any revenue record, any British survey, or any administrative document. If the family's true identity had been "Kalal," then the residential quarter built under the personal authority of the man himself would have borne that name. It did not. It bore the name Ahluwalia — because that was who they were.

This is not a matter of interpretation. It is a matter of bricks, mortar, and the recorded name of a living locality that has endured for over 260 years. The Katra Ahluwalia is a physical monument to the identity that Jassa Singh chose, that his contemporaries recognised, and that history has preserved — undisturbed by the fabrications of later adversaries.

Evidence 10: The Ahluwalia Bunga — Not "Kalal Bunga"

During the eighteenth century, the Sikh misl chiefs and prominent Sikh leaders constructed Bungas — fortified dwelling structures — around Sri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar. These Bungas served as rest houses for pilgrims, treasuries, military outposts, and centres of learning. Over seventy such Bungas of different shapes and forms were built around the Golden Temple complex during this period. Each Bunga bore the name of the misl or leader who constructed it: the Ramgarhia Bunga, the Akal Bunga, the Shaheed Bunga — and the Ahluwalia Bunga.

The Bunga constructed under the authority and patronage of the Ahluwalia misl was called the Ahluwalia Bunga — not the "Kalal Bunga." This is a critical piece of evidence, and its significance cannot be overstated. The Bungas around Sri Harmandir Sahib were not named casually. They were named with deliberate institutional authority, recorded in contemporary accounts, and recognized by the entire Panth. If the family's identity had truly been "Kalal," the Bunga would have been known by that name. It was not. It was built, known, and recorded as the Ahluwalia Bunga — well before the "Kalal" label was manufactured by the family's enemies.

Every single institution built by this family — every Katra, every Bunga, every fortification — bore the name Ahluwalia. The "Kalal" label was not part of the family's institutional vocabulary, because it was not part of the family's identity. It was introduced later, by adversaries, for strategic purposes — and unfortunately adopted by later historians who failed to question its origins.

Evidence 11: The Ahluwalia Misl — Not "Kalal Misl"

The Sikh confederacy led by Jassa Singh has been known throughout history as the Ahluwalia Misl — never as the "Kalal Misl." This is not a marginal point. The twelve misls of the Sikh Confederacy were the fundamental political and military units of Sikh sovereignty in the eighteenth century. Each misl was named with precision, and those names carried sovereign weight. The Sukerchakia Misl, the Ramgarhia Misl, the Bhangi Misl, the Kanhaiya Misl — every misl bore a name that reflected its identity and origin. The misl led by Jassa Singh was called Ahluwalia, deriving its name from Ahlu, the ancestral village of the misl leaders.

No contemporary source — Sikh, Mughal, Afghan, Maratha, or British — ever referred to this confederacy as the "Kalal Misl." The name Ahluwalia was the sovereign designation used in all treaties, all territorial records, all political correspondence, and all military engagements. If the "Kalal" identity had been genuine, it is inconceivable that a sovereign misl — recognised across the entire Punjab and beyond — would have been universally known by a different name. The misl was Ahluwalia because its leaders were Ahluwalia. The "Kalal" designation was a later fabrication that found no place in the political vocabulary of the eighteenth-century Punjab.

Evidence 12: All Correspondence — Signed as Ahluwalia, Never Kalal

Every piece of diplomatic and political correspondence involving Jassa Singh — whether with the British East India Company, with Afghan intermediaries, with Mughal officials, with Maratha allies, or with other Sikh misls — was conducted under the name Ahluwalia. There is no known letter, treaty, farmaan, or official communication in which Jassa Singh identified himself as "Kalal," or in which any foreign power addressed him by that label.

This is a decisive evidentiary point. In the world of eighteenth-century diplomacy, names carried sovereign authority. A leader's self-identification in official correspondence was the definitive statement of his political and personal identity. Jassa Singh signed as Ahluwalia. His successors signed as Ahluwalia. The British, who were meticulous record-keepers and who had every strategic reason to diminish Sikh leaders, nevertheless recorded his name as Ahluwalia in their official correspondence and administrative records. The "Kalal" label appears nowhere in the diplomatic record — because it was not part of the historical reality. It was introduced later, through channels that had nothing to do with the family's own self representation.

Evidence 13: The Caste-Hypocrisy Argument — Liquor Distillation Was Universal, and the Hindu Varna System Did Not Distinguish Between Jats and Kalals

The entire foundation of the "Kalal" slander rests upon an association with liquor distillation — the implication being that Jassa Singh's ancestors were engaged in the production of distilled spirits and therefore belonged to a community defined by that occupation. This argument collapses under even the most basic scrutiny, for two independent and equally devastating reasons.

First, the practice of home distillation of liquor — known locally as desi sharab or ghar di kaddi — was not confined to any single community in the Punjab. It was practised widely across the region, in virtually every village, by families of every background. Jat families, in particular, were extensively involved in the home distillation of liquor across Punjab for generations. This was not an occasional or marginal practice: it was a deeply embedded part of rural Punjabi life, referenced in folk culture, in music, and in the social customs of the countryside. If the label "Kalal" is to be applied to anyone who distilled liquor, then it must logically be applied to a vast number of Jat families as well — and indeed to much of rural Punjab. The selective application of this label to one family alone, while ignoring its universal practice across the region, reveals the label for what it truly is: not a description of occupation, but a weapon of targeted defamation.

Second — and this point must be stated with scholarly precision and without disrespect to any community — the attempt to use the "Kalal" label as a means of lowering Jassa Singh's social standing depends upon a particular reading of the Hindu caste hierarchy. But that very hierarchy, when examined honestly, does not support the intended conclusion. Within the traditional Hindu varna system, the Jat community itself was never classified among the "twice-born" (dvija) varnas — that is, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas who undergo the sacred thread ceremony. The classical Hindu texts did not place Jats in the Kshatriya varna; various British colonial census records and Hindu legal texts classified Jats alongside the Shudra varna — the same broad category to which Kalals were assigned. In the rigid framework of the Hindu caste hierarchy, Jats and Kalals occupied broadly comparable positions — neither community held the exalted RajputBhatti or Kshatriya status.

This is not stated to diminish any community. It is stated to expose the logical absurdity of the "Kalal" slander. The enemies of Jassa Singh attempted to lower his standing by associating him with a "Kalal" identity — but the very caste framework they invoked to achieve this purpose would have classified Jats in a comparable position. The entire argument is self-defeating. It only succeeds if one accepts the Hindu caste hierarchy as a valid measure of human worth — which Sikh philosophy emphatically and categorically rejects.

This brings us to the deepest irony of the entire "Kalal" narrative. The Sikh Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev Ji onwards, rejected the caste system in its entirety. Guru Gobind Singh Ji's creation of the Khalsa in 1699 was a revolutionary act precisely because it abolished caste distinctions. A Sikh leader's worth was measured by devotion, courage, and service to the Panth — not by the occupation of a distant ancestor. The very attempt to classify Jassa Singh by caste — any caste — is a violation of the foundational principles of Sikhi. And the fact that the communities being invoked for comparison occupy similar positions within the Hindu hierarchy only underscores the intellectual bankruptcy of the entire enterprise.

SECTION VII: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DECIMATION — WHEN WARRIORS CANNOT BE CONQUERED

A. The Universal Pattern

The strategy deployed against Jassa Singh Ahluwalia is not unique to him. It is a universal pattern — a recurring feature of human conflict that appears wherever an unconquerable leader stands against powerful enemies. Throughout world history, when military force cannot defeat a leader, enemies resort to character assassination, identity attacks, and social degradation.

Alexander the Great's enemies questioned the legitimacy of his succession. Hannibal Barca's enemies — particularly the Roman senators who could never match him on the battlefield — attacked his character, portraying him as treacherous and barbaric. Shivaji Maharaj's enemies used caste to diminish his claim to sovereignty, challenging his right to the royal title because of his social origins. Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Haitian revolutionary who defeated Napoleon's armies, was captured through treachery when force of arms failed — and then systematically degraded in French captivity.

The pattern is always the same: when you cannot defeat the body, attack the name. When you cannot destroy the army, destroy the reputation. When you cannot conquer the leader, conquer the historical record.

B. The Specific Tactics Used Against Jassa Singh

The psychological warfare campaign against Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was not a single attack but a multi-layered strategy employing five distinct but interconnected tactics. Each tactic reinforced the others, creating a web of falsehood that became increasingly difficult to disentangle as the decades and centuries passed.

9. **LINGUISTIC WARFARE:** The deliberate alteration of "Kalial" to "Kalal" — a single syllable shift that transformed a respectable community connection into a stigmatized occupational label. This was linguistic precision weaponized: a minimal change in sound that produced a maximum change in social meaning. The architects of this distortion

understood the caste conscious society they operated in, and they crafted their weapon accordingly.

10. **COIN WARFARE:** The creation of a forged coin that simultaneously served two strategic objectives — provoking Abdali into another genocidal invasion and creating a physical "documentary record" that would embed the false label in the numismatic and historical archive. The coin was a masterpiece of dual-purpose propaganda: a single object that was both a letter to an Afghan emperor and a forgery designed to fool future historians.

11. **CLASSIFICATION WARFARE:** The British census and gazetteers seized upon the existing Maulvi propaganda and fixed a fluid, contested, enemy imposed label into a rigid official category — giving it the authority of state documentation. The colonial classification machine did not create the "Kalal" label, but it preserved and institutionalized it, transforming enemy slander into administrative "fact."

12. **REPETITION WARFARE:** The echo chamber of historians repeating the false label across generations, each repetition adding apparent authority, each citation making the original source harder to trace and the falsehood harder to challenge. This is the most insidious tactic of all, because it requires no active malice from the later participants — only a failure of critical thinking.

13. **DIVISION WARFARE:** The use of caste labels to create internal divisions within the Sikh community itself — to import the poison of hierarchical thinking into a community whose founding principles explicitly rejected all hierarchy of birth. By labeling the supreme Sikh commander as "Kalal," enemies sought not only to diminish him personally but to fracture the unity of the Khalsa along caste lines.

C. Why This Strategy Was Chosen for Jassa Singh Specifically

The question must be asked: why was this particular strategy — this multilayered, multifront campaign of psychological warfare — deployed specifically against Jassa Singh Ahluwalia? Why him, out of all the Sikh commanders of the eighteenth century?

The answer lies in the unique convergence of factors that made Jassa Singh the single most dangerous leader the Khalsa's enemies had ever faced:

- He was the **Supreme Commander** — the single most important Sikh leader, democratically elected by the entire Khalsa to lead them.
- He was the **Jathedar of Buddha Dal** — the head of the most feared warrior order in Punjab, the institutional backbone of Sikh military power.
- He **survived every military attempt to destroy him** — including twenty-two wounds at the Wadda Ghallughara, the most devastating massacre in Sikh history.
- He **captured Lahore**, struck coins in Guru's name, and declared Sikh sovereignty — the ultimate humiliation for both the Afghans and the Mughal remnants.
- He **rebuilt the Harmandir Sahib** after desecration — a spiritual triumph that renewed Sikh resolve after the darkest hour.
- He **marched on Delhi** — demonstrating that Sikh power could project force far beyond Punjab.
- He **founded a state** — creating a permanent, sovereign Sikh domain that would endure for generations.

There was literally no military solution to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. He could not be killed in battle — he survived twenty-two wounds. He could not be broken by massacre — he rebuilt after the Ghallughara. He could not be contained within Punjab — he marched on Delhi. He could not be denied sovereignty — he struck coins and founded a state. He was, in every measurable dimension, unconquerable.

And therefore, every enemy — Maulvi, Afghan, and British — independently concluded that the only way to diminish him was through non-military means. The weapons of words were deployed precisely because the weapons of war had failed.

> "No sword could fell him. No army could break him. No massacre could stop him. So his enemies chose a different weapon — a word. A single, deliberately chosen, strategically deployed word: 'Kalal.'

> And with that word, they attempted to accomplish what nine Afghan invasions, the Wadda Ghallughara, and two Anglo-Sikh Wars could not: the decimation of Sultanul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They failed then, and they fail now

> — because truth, like the Khalsa itself, cannot be permanently conquered."

A. The Commitment to Truth (Sat)

Sikh philosophy begins with Ik Onkar Sat Naam — the One Creator, whose Name is Truth. Truth is not merely a value in Sikhi; it is the very nature of the Divine. The entire Sikh ethical system rests on the foundation of truthful living — "Truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living" (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji).

Correcting a false historical narrative is an act of truthfulness — an obligation of truthful living. It is not caste pride. It is not social ambition. It is the refusal to accept a lie as history. A Sikh is duty-bound to challenge falsehood wherever it is found — in society, in politics, in religion, and in the historical record. When a false label has been deliberately manufactured by adversaries, weaponized for strategic purposes, and uncritically repeated by historians, the commitment to truth demands that it be corrected.

The genealogical argument presented in this article is therefore a defensive correction of deliberate historical distortion. It is not an offensive claim of superiority. It is the restoration of truth against a campaign of lies.

B. The Commitment to Equality

And here we arrive at the second principle — one that must be stated with equal force and equal clarity.

Even if the "Kalal" label were true, it would change nothing about Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's achievements.

Not one thing.

> The Khalsa recognizes no hierarchy of birth. Guru Nanak Dev Ji rejected the sacred thread — the symbol of caste privilege — when he was a child. Guru Angad Dev Ji was born into a Trehan family; Guru Amar Das Ji into a Bhalla family; Guru Ram Das Ji into a Sodhi family of modest means. The selection of Gurus crossed family lines, proving that spiritual authority in Sikhi has nothing to do with lineage. Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the Khalsa in 1699 precisely to destroy caste — to create a new identity in which the accident of birth was irrelevant, and only devotion to truth, righteousness, and the community mattered.

> "Recognize ye all the Human Race as One." — Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Akal Ustat

It is not "recognize some of the human race as one." It is absolute: all — without exception. A Sikh who accepts this principle cannot, by definition, regard any human being as inferior on the basis of birth, occupation, or ancestry.

C. The Critical Distinction

Historical genealogy and the caste system are fundamentally different things. They must not be confused.

Genealogy is the tracing of ancestry — the pursuit of historical truth about one's family origins. Every culture in human history has practiced genealogy. It is a legitimate field of historical inquiry. It makes no claims about the worth of different lineages; it merely seeks to establish what actually happened.

The caste system is a hierarchical system of oppression — a social structure that assigns worth, dignity, opportunity, and status on the basis of birth. It is the antithesis of the Sikh principle that all human beings are equal before the Creator.

We correct the false "Kalal" label because **lies are unacceptable** — not because ancestry determines worth. We reject the enemy's fabrication because a Sikh cannot accept falsehood — not because we regard any occupation as inferior. We insist on historical accuracy because truth is the Name of God — not because one genealogical line is "higher" than another.

And here is the acid test — the test that separates the commitment to truth from the embrace of caste:

> **The Acid Test:**
>
> If someone declared that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was descended from the community that the caste system labels the "lowest"
>
> — would that change anything about his capture of Lahore? Would it diminish his twenty-two wounds at the Wadda Ghallughara? Would it invalidate his unanimous election as Sultan-ul-Qaum? Would it reduce the significance of his rebuilding the Harmandir Sahib? Would it negate his founding of Kapurthala State? Would it make his four decades of service to the Khalsa any less heroic, any less consequential, any less worthy of eternal remembrance?
>
> **Of course not.**

> The answer is as clear as the Guru's teaching: no one is high and no one is low. Jassa Singh's greatness stands on the granite foundation of his deeds — and no label, whether true or false, can diminish it by a single grain.

Platforms Requiring Correction

Several widely consulted platforms — including but not limited to SikhiWiki, Wikipedia, and other community-edited encyclopedic sites — currently repeat the "Kalal" label in their entries on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. These entries, however well-intentioned, are the products of the echo chamber effect described in Section V. They cite later sources that themselves cite colonial classifications and enemy propaganda, creating a circular chain of references that traces back not to evidence but to adversarial fabrication.

These platforms are community-edited precisely because they value accuracy over tradition. Any informed researcher can submit corrections, provided they are well-sourced and properly documented. The correction of the Jassa Singh Ahluwalia entry on these platforms should include the following elements:

14. **The absence of early evidence:** The earliest biographical source — Jassa Singh Binod by Sri Ram Sukh Rao — identifies the family as Rajput Bhatti. The "Kalal" label does not appear in early Sikh sources.
15. **The undisputed landownership:** The family owned four villages — Ahlo, Hallo, Toor, and Chak — a fact incompatible with the "poor Kalal" characterization.
16. **The maternal lineage:** The maternal uncle was Bagh Singh Hallowalia, not "Kalal," proving the maternal family did not use this occupational label.

10. **The coin forgery evidence:** The Sikh Encyclopedia itself states that the "Jassa Kalal" coin was likely "arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore" — not issued by the Sikhs.
11. **The historical context of adversarial propaganda:** Three separate adversarial forces — the Maulvis, the Afghans, and the British — each had independent strategic reasons to diminish Jassa Singh's legacy through caste-labeling.
12. **The Sikh philosophical position:** The Khalsa recognizes no hierarchy of birth. Caste is irrelevant to spiritual or social worth. The correction is motivated by the commitment to truth, not by any claim of caste superiority.

Any future discussion of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's family origins should be held to the same standard of evidence that is applied to any historical claim:

- What is the earliest source for the claim?
- Did the subject or his family ever use this identification?
- Who first introduced the label, and what were their interests?
- Is the claim consistent with independently verified facts (landownership, family names, education, social standing)?
- Has the claim been subjected to rigorous source criticism, or has it been passively repeated from earlier secondary sources?

By these standards — the standards of responsible historical inquiry — the "Kalal" label fails at every point. It should be removed from authoritative entries and replaced with what the evidence actually supports: the Ahluwalia identity, derived from the village of Ahlu, with a genealogical tradition tracing the family to Rajput Bhatti origins.

SECTION X: CONCLUSION — SETTLING THE MATTER FOREVER

This article has conducted a comprehensive, multi-front examination of the false "Kalal" label that has been attached to the name of Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia — an examination that has drawn upon military history, numismatic evidence, linguistic analysis, colonial studies, historiographical method, social theory, and Sikh philosophy.
The examination has been thorough because the subject demands thoroughness.

It has been rigorous because the historical record demands rigor. And it has been passionate because truth demands passion — the same passion that drove Jassa Singh Ahluwalia across forty years of warfare, through twenty two wounds at the Ghallughara, and into the gates of Lahore, Sirhind, and Delhi.

Let us summaries what this analysis has established.

The Multi-Front Campaign

The Maulvis of Lahore — the Muslim religious leaders who saw rising Sikh power as an existential threat — forged a coin in 1761 that bore the derogatory label "Jassa Kalal." This coin served a dual strategic purpose: it provoked Ahmad Shah Abdali into returning to Punjab for another genocidal campaign, and it planted a false "documentary record" that would mislead historians for centuries. The Sikh Encyclopedia itself identifies this coin as enemy propaganda — "arranged to be struck by some religious leaders of Lahore for despatching it to Ahmad Shah Durrani with the intention of rousing his ire."

Ahmad Shah Abdali and his Afghan forces deployed psychological warfare when military genocide failed. After nine invasions, after the Wadda Ghallughara, after the desecration of the Harmandir Sahib — Abdali could not permanently subdue the Sikhs. The Maulvi propaganda served his strategic interests by maintaining a narrative of Sikh illegitimacy.

The British colonial administration created a vast apparatus of caste classification that served the strategic needs of imperial governance — dividing Indian society into rigid categories, diminishing warrior classes, and rewriting the histories of the leaders who had most fiercely resisted colonial conquest. Lepel Griffin — a colonial administrator, not a historian — dismissed the Bhatti Rajput genealogy of the Ahluwalia family without evidence and imposed a colonial classification that later historians would uncritically repeat. The British specifically targeted the Nihang order — of which Jassa Singh had been the supreme chief — for physical destruction, and the diminishment of Jassa Singh's legacy was part of the larger campaign to destroy the institutional memory of the Nihang tradition.

Later historians were trapped by the echo chamber effect — repeating the false label from colonial sources without interrogating its origins, its consistency with other evidence, or its strategic context. Each repetition gave the falsehood more apparent authority, until it appeared to be "established fact" — when it was, in reality, enemy propaganda preserved by colonial classification and amplified by uncritical repetition.

The Evidence Is Conclusive

Against this campaign of falsehood stands the evidence — clear, comprehensive, and unanswerable:

- **No early Sikh source** uses the label "Kalal." The earliest biographical work identifies the family as Rajput Bhatti.
- **The family owned four villages** — Ahlo, Hallo, Toor, and Chak. The characterisation of this family as "poor" is historically impossible.
- **The maternal uncle was Hallowalia** — not Kalal. The maternal family did not use this label.
- **The coin was forged** by Lahore's religious leaders — not issued by the Sikhs. The Sikh Encyclopedia itself says so.
- **The family never identified as Kalal.** Their identity was Ahluwalia — "of Ahluwal" — derived from their ancestral village.
- **The ancestral marriage** into the Kalial (not Kalal) family was based on Gursikhi — devotion to the Guru's path — not on caste identity.
- **The mother's spiritual eminence** and the seven years of education under Mata Sundri Ji's personal household speak to a family of established standing, not a marginal occupational group.
- **The convergence of three enemy interests** — Maulvi, Afghan, and British — explains the persistence of the false label far better than any historical evidence.

The Final Word

This article stands as the final, integrated, multi-angle examination of this matter. The false label originated from adversaries. It was amplified by colonial agents. It was repeated by uncritical historians. And it is now dismantled — permanently, comprehensively, and from every conceivable angle — by the evidence, the logic, and the truth.

Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia does not need our defense. His record speaks for itself — in the coins he struck, in the cities he captured, in the shrines he rebuilt, in the wounds

he bore, and in the state he founded. His legacy is written not in the gazetteers of colonial administrators or the forged coins of Maulvi propagandists, but in the living memory of the Khalsa Panth, in the stones of Harmandir Sahib, and in the sovereign history of the Punjab.

But truth needs defenders. Lies do not correct themselves. And a Sikh — bound by the Guru's command to live truthfully — cannot remain silent when falsehood masquerades as history.

DEDICATION

> This article is dedicated to the memory of Sultan-ul-Qaum Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia (1718–1783) and to all those — past, present, and future — who stand for truth against propaganda, for dignity against caste, and for justice against the distortions of history.

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